

*The Case of Authority consider'd as it respects
Religion, particularly the Christian.*

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A
SERMON

PREACH'D AT

St. MARY's in OXFORD,

AT THE

ASSIZES:

Before the HONOURABLE

Mr. BARON ABNET,

AND BEFORE THE

UNIVERSITY;

On *Thursday, July 29. 1742.*

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MATTH. VII. 29.

*For He taught them as one having
Authority, and not as the Scribes.*

IT is frequently remark'd by the Evangelists throughout their Histories, as one Character of our Blessed Saviour's Doctrines and Preaching, that they were accompanied with a peculiar Weight and Energy in their Delivery, which plainly spoke them to be of more than human Original, and commanded the Attention and Reverence of his Hearers. Both the Matter and the Manner of his Teaching had something uncommon in them; his Words carry'd with them at once Conviction and Authority; and the Force of his Discourses wrought so power-
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fully upon Men's Minds, that it oblig'd them to regard him not barely under the Notion of a moral Instructor, but as an authoritative Teacher. For we find the People were led to this Opinion of him, not only upon seeing his Miracles and feeling the beneficent Effects of his healing Hand, which were undeniable Proofs of an extraordinary Power, but the same Reflections occur'd to them likewise upon the hearing his Discourses, and the Wisdom with which he spake. And accordingly it is often after giving us an Account of some Divine Lesson of Instruction or remarkable Parable, that the sacred Historian concludes his Relation with observing, that *the People were astonished at his Doctrine*, for that *his Word was with Power*, (Luk. 4. 32.) that *he taught them as one that had Authority*, and the like Expressions. And indeed so sensible were even his bitterest Enemies of this, that they knew not how to evade the Force of it, but by giving it an invidious Turn, and endeavouring to defeat the Credit of his Doctrine by insinuating Prejudices against his Person, upon account of the Meanness of his Birth and Education, *How knoweth this Man letters, having never learned? whence hath he this Wisdom and these mighty Works? is not this the Carpenter's Son? — and they*

they were offended in him. (Matth. 13. 54.) In this Manner did they hope to divert the People's Attention to him at the same time that they themselves *all bare him witness*, as St Luke expresses it, (4. 22.) *and wonder'd at the gracious Words which proceeded out of his Mouth*; whilst the less prejudic'd Part of his Hearers could openly see and confess that *never Man spake like this Man*, (Joh. 7. 46.) and that he could certainly be no other than some eminent *Prophet* at least, if not the *great Prophet* himself, the expected *Messiah*. (Joh. 7. 40, &c.)

What the particular Teaching of the Scribes was, which in the Text is oppos'd to that of our Saviour, may not be very material to enquire. But from the Character of the Scribes throughout the Gospels, it is most probable it consisted chiefly in vain *Traditions*, and *Commandments of Men*, in cold unedifying *Explications of the Law*, in *fruitless Questions and Fables and endless Genealogies*, with which they amused their Audience without either Grace or Efficacy. But the Power and Dignity of our Blessed Saviour's Teaching was widely different from the Sophistry of these Jewish Doctors; He taught, not as a dry Expositor of uncertain human Traditions, but in the Style and

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Authority of a Lawgiver, that is, he taught as one that had a *Right* to teach, as one who was commission'd from Heaven, and was *endued with Power from on high*, to instruct Mankind in Religion, and to enforce the Practice of it.

It should seem, from what has been observ'd, that Authority in Matters of Religion is a Recommendation of it; or rather, to speak more plainly, that Authority is of the highest Importance in Religion, that it is even necessary in order to establish it upon its right Foundation, and to procure it that Reception and Influence in the World which it ought to have. But contrary to this, it has been maintain'd, and is become a fashionable Doctrine, that Authority is of little or no use at all in Religion; that Mankind are to be govern'd by their own Reason, that is by those Rules of Duty which the Light of Nature sufficiently discovers to them, as resulting from the essential Differences and Relations of Things, from the natural Fitness and Unfitness of Action.

I design therefore in the following Discourse,

- I. *First*, To shew the Use and the real Influences of Authority in Matters of Moral and Religious Conduct. And,

II. *Second*

II. *Secondly*, I shall point out some of the chief Instances in which our Blessed Saviour might properly be said to *teach with Authority*.

I. *First* then, I am to shew the Use and the *real* Influences of Authority in Matters of Moral and Religious Conduct.

The different Representations that have been given of Mankind have been the Occasion of very different and inconsistent Doctrines in Religion. For whilst some have consider'd Man only in one View, as a sinful degenerate Creature, and under all the Disadvantages of a fallen corrupted State, others have chose to view him on the more favourable Side, as a Rational and a Moral Agent, as furnished by the Author of Nature with intellectual Abilities suited to the Ends of his Being and Rank in the Creation, abstractedly from the Consideration of any opposite Principle within him, or the Degeneracy of his present Condition. The former, dwelling too long on the disgraceful Part of Human Nature, are sometimes apt to degrade it even beneath itself, as if it had nothing left in it of its Original Composition, nor any other Principle of Action remaining

maining but the Ruins of Vice and Folly. And the latter, fond of the flattering Picture of their own Perfections, are too apt to indulge their Descriptions beyond the Life, and their high Encomiums upon the Dignity and Excellency of the Human Nature are scarce reconcileable with the Supposition of a State of Defection in Man, or of any Thing disorder'd in his Constitution.

'Tis obvious to see what opposite Plans of Religion must be form'd upon such opposite Representations of Mankind. The One must assert not only the Expediency, but the absolute Necessity of a Divine Revelation to enlighten the Mind of Man, in which the very first Impressions even of Natural Religion are suppos'd to be quite obliterated. But the Reasonings of the Other should seem to supersede the Use of any Divine Assistance at all, as they proceed upon the Supposition of the Sufficiency of Reason for the Purposes of Religion, and of the Continuance of that Rectitude in the human Nature, which originally belong'd to it.

The Errors of both these Extremes will be best corrected by considering the real State of Mankind, as it subsists in *fact*: in which Consideration, Experience of ourselves and others will be a surer Guide than the Accounts given

us by speculative Men, and will better help us to discover how far the Force of Reason may be suppos'd to carry us, and where the Interposition of Authority must be call'd in to its Assistance.

What Man was in his State of Innocence, and as he came recent from the Hands of his Maker, or how it came to pass that he should degenerate into that Degree of Sin and Ignorance which is his present State, are Enquiries foreign to my Purpose. Let it be sufficient to survey him as he now is, and to consider that, whatever his State be, 'tis such as the Providence of God has *in fact* plac'd him in, and must therefore be *finally* reconcileable with the Conduct of Infinite Wisdom and Goodness towards him.

We find Man then, exclusive of the Supposition of Revelation or any external Assistance, to be previously in possession of some Rule of Action, or Guide of moral Conduct; that is, there is a Sense of Good and Evil, of Right and Wrong implanted in us by Nature, a *Law written in our hearts*, which every one feels in himself, and experiences the Effects of it in others. And farther, this, which I will call the Moral Sense, were it suffer'd to operate freely and according to its natural Tendency, would be

be likewise a perfect and sufficient Rule for every Purpose of his Being, sufficient for his Conduct here, and his Happiness hereafter. For the Mind is in itself as rightly dispos'd towards moral Objects, as the Eye is with respect to visible ones; it is as fitly framed to discern the moral Differences of Things, as the Eye is to distinguish Colours. Both the one and the other, if they are plac'd in a right Position, will see their respective Objects as they really are, and as they ought to appear: but if they view them obliquely, through a false Medium, or at an undue Distance, the Objects must consequently appear distorted, and out of Nature. The Percipient Faculty in both is still *real*, and is in the general a directive Rule to act by, however in particular Cases it may be defeated in its Operations, or obstructed from operating at all.

That this is not mere Speculation will farther appear, if we consider that Mankind do in fact presuppose the Existence of such a Rule in their whole Conduct of Life, and Dealings with one another; that is, they do, whether they attend to it or not, constantly and invariably act upon the Presumption of a Right and a Wrong in things, and of a Capacity likewise in themselves to distinguish the one from the

the other. What are all the Instances of Praise and Infamy, of Applause and Censure that are so arbitrarily and so capriciously dispens'd about in the world, but so many Proofs of a suppos'd Worthyness and Unworthyness in Characters, as relative to some Moral Rule? Even every Passion and Affection of the human Mind will be finally resolveable into this Principle. Resentment, Love, Gratitude, Revenge, are all grounded upon the Supposition of moral Good and Evil existing, of a Just and Unjust in Actions, of personal Merit and Demerit. And however the Affection may be misplac'd, or the Object misunderstood, yet the Principle itself is confess'd, and 'tis in the Application only that we err, for the very Notion of Error is grounded upon the Supposition of Truth. And if it were so, that we should deviate even more from the Rule of Right than we do, and that the Objection, which is made by some of the Uncertainty of the Nature of Virtue and Vice from the various Opinions of various Nations concerning it, were stronger than it is, yet what could be concluded from thence, but that there is some suppos'd Standard of Truth universally acknowledg'd, some real Criterion of Morality, tho' perverted by some, and mistaken by others? I would only add, that such a Moral

Sense as this must necessarily be suppos'd previous to, and even the Ground-work of Revelation itself. For who does not see, that the Proof of any Revelation with respect to us must depend upon the Power of distinguishing betwixt Truth and Falshood, and that its Evidence of every kind must be ultimately determin'd by our own Right of judging to which it appeals, prior to any Consideration of Authority or Veracity in the Deity?

Thus then it appears that Mankind are not left destitute of a Rule of Action, even tho' no Revelation should have been granted. It now remains that we examine more particularly what Use is made of this Rule, and whether it be of so great Advantage in the Conduct of Life and Religion, as to supersede the Use of any other Rule. And here we are to turn our Eyes towards a more unpleasing View of ourselves, whilst we contemplate the present Condition of Man, strangely perverted from his original Perfection, and acting in Opposition to that Intelligent Principle, which is the Glory and Excellency of his Nature. Both the Light of Nature as well as Revelation represents him as in a corrupt degenerate State, fallen from his native Purity and moral Abili-

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ties; both his Will and Power to perform good Actions greatly weaken'd and impair'd, and his Inclinations to evil strong and importunate. For it must be remember'd, there is another Principle in Man besides that of Reason. There is, in the Apostle's Words literally taken, *a Law in his members fighting against the Law of his mind*, fighting against that original Law of God and Nature, which was design'd for his Guide and Director. All this is what the Heathens themselves were very sensible of and do constantly lament. — Now from this Degeneracy of Nature, 'tis obvious to be infer'd, and 'tis too well confirm'd by Experience, that Man left to himself must make but slow Advances in the way of Virtue; the Moral Principle works but feebly, in too loose and general a Manner to be a fix'd Principle; every Trifle sets it aside; it is liable to be impos'd upon by every vain Pretence of present Good, whether suggested by Interest or Fancy; and it suffers itself to be disguis'd a thousand ways, in which Men flatter themselves they are acting under its Directions. Whilst the opposite Principle is perpetually usurping the Dominion, gets an easy Ascendant over it, and *brings it into Captivity to the Law of Sin*.

Writes,

Writers, who have been dispos'd to represent Mankind in the more favourable Light, affect commonly to overlook this latter Ingredient in his Nature, as if it was properly speaking not a Part of it, something external only or adventitious to it, which might perhaps here and there by accident interrupt the Regularity of his Conduct, or disturb his Reason. So neither do they enough reflect on the vast Inequalities of Men amongst one another, with respect to their moral Capacities and Advantages of Improvement. They consider the Rational Nature and the whole Species in the gross, and speak of Mankind in general in the same exalted Strain, as is applicable only to Men of Superior Genius and enlarg'd Understandings. And thus what is in fact the Property of the Few is thrown into the common Stock, and made the general Estimate of Human Abilities, as if all Men were equal sharers in the Gifts of Providence. And hence is it natural for them to expatiate copiously upon the Excellency and Power of Reason, upon the Strength and Efficacy of the moral Sense, and consequently upon the Sufficiency of the Light of Nature to discover our Duty, and to recommend it. And consistently with this View of things is Virtue describ'd under every amiable

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Character that can engage the Affections of an Intelligent Mind, thus fitted by Nature to comprehend her Excellence, her intrinsic Worth, her native Beauty, and readily to see and admire in her all those Charms, with which Speculatists in their philosophical Retirements are wont to adorn her. And indeed such a Representation would be exceeding just, were Mankind all Intellect only, were there no Allay in their Nature, nothing of the baser kind intermix'd with their Constitution, in short had they no Passions to gratify, and that Providence had placed them in such a Situation, as that neither through Incapacity, Ignorance, nor Attendance on the necessary Affairs of Life, they should be drawn off from those higher Pursuits, that is, had each Man Leisure and Abilities of knowing and practicing his Duty from the mere Sense that it *was* his Duty, — such as this may perhaps be the State of some superior Rank of Beings, but how little it belongs to us, few I presume need to be inform'd. — For, without entering into the blackest Characters of our Species and the more flagrant Degrees of Corruption and Wickedness, which call for the immediate Redress of the civil Magistrate, and which give Occasion to such Solemnities as these in Government, what Sentiments of

Virtue

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Virtue do we find the Generality of the World possess'd of in the ordinary Course of Life? do they ever reason upon it in an abstracted manner, as their chief Good and highest Perfection, to be chosen for its own sake, and that carries with it its own Reward? are they struck with the Amiability of it, and do they view it in the same disinterested Light, in which contemplative Theorists behold it? are they able to frame to themselves in the least tolerable degree a consistent Rule of Action, upon the Principles of moral Fitness, or the Relations and Reasons of things? or do they even understand such a Rule, when 'tis delineated by others? can they carry their Thoughts through the long Chain of Causes, Connexions, Consequences, upon which Systems of Moral Duty must be founded, and Conviction wrought in the Mind? and if Philosophers themselves have disputed how far Morality may be capable of Demonstration, what Accounts of it must we expect to meet with from the uneducated Part of Mortals? nothing but Confusion and gross Ignorance. In short, they seem to be but little affected with the abstracted Worth and Excellence of Virtue, her Power is not strong enough to be a prevailing Principle within them, they can behold her without any Emotion,

motion, and *are deaf to the Voice of the Charmer, charm she never so wisely.* — The Truth is, the Moral Taste, like other liberal Arts and Accomplishments, is to be attain'd by Study and Application. Nature only lays the first rude Materials, but it is the Hand of the Skillfull Artist that must finish the Piece, and bring it into Form. The Faculties must be call'd forth into Action by Use and Exercise, or the Principle itself will be in danger of being greatly obscur'd, if not totally sunk.

If this then be the general Condition of Mankind, what Principles do we find they act upon? We have seen they have a natural Sense of Good and Evil to direct them, but that this is defective and insufficient for the Purpose. What is it then but Authority, for the most part implicit Authority that guides them? 'Tis this which has the leading Influence in practise, and may be said to govern them in the general Course of Life. 'Tis visible in their worldly Concerns, as well as in the Affairs of Religion and Morals. They act even in common Life by *receiv'd* Rules of Policy, and Maxims that have been establish'd before them: are led on by Custom, Vogue, Example, Fashion, but least of all by that which is pretended, the Reason
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of the thing, any farther than as the Reason of the thing is suppos'd to be included in the general Voice. Indeed there seems to be, if I may so call it, a natural Sense of Authority in Men's Minds, a tacit Deference that is paid to the Opinions and Practices of others. And happily for us is it so order'd by Providence, that what is wanting to each Man in his private Capacity from the Weakness and Imperfection of his Nature, should be supply'd him as it were out of the common Fund, the united Wisdom of the Publick.

Observe how it is in Government. Men find themselves born in Society, where there is a Circulation of relative Duties, and a Constitution settled: they do not immediately enter into Enquiries concerning Right, or examine into the Merits or Titles of their Governours; they are dispos'd to obey; they naturally presume a Wisdom in the Administration, and an Obligation to Submission in themselves, and they think themselves happy in the Assistance of their Superiors to judge and act for them. Extraordinary Cases are out of the question, as where Government is oppressive and intends the Ruin of the Community, but in the ordinary Course of things, where private Ambition, Avarice, and the like do not interfere,

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Laws are readily submitted to, by virtue of that implicit Sense of Authority, without which no Society can subsist.

And so it is in the higher Concerns of Religious and Moral Conduct. The Existence and Nature of Deity, the Relation we bear to it, Divine Government, the Doctrines of Providence and a future State, the everlasting Notions of Good and Evil, Natural Religion, Worship, are all Matters of abstruse Speculation, whose Principles are not at all levell'd to the general Comprehensions of Mankind, or suited to the Capacities of Minds unimprov'd. They do not reason them out for themselves; they find the World already in possession of them, and they succeed to them by Inheritance. They do not stay to convince themselves of their Truth upon Rational Grounds, but they take it for granted they are true because they are taught, and on the other hand that they are taught because they are true.

I hope I am in no danger of being misunderstood as tending to weaken the Foundation of those great Truths, as if they were arbitrary and precarious Principles, and came into the World by accident only, and had nothing else to depend upon for their Support in it, but Authority and Prescription. The Argument

supposes the contrary, that they are the genuine Offspring of God and Nature, Original Impressions of the Mind and Dictates of Reason, and that their being thus universally receiv'd is an infallible Proof of their Reality and Truth. I am speaking of Mankind in a general View, that with regard to much the greater Part, they do not, they cannot embrace those Principles upon an explicit Persuasion of their Truth, but *must* take them for the most part upon Trust, and suffer themselves to be influenc'd by that Authority, which carries a natural Sanction along with it. Providence has still prepar'd the Mind for their Reception, by that natural Sense of Right implanted in them, which, tho' at first unable to discover them, yet when discover'd, is kindly prejudic'd in their Favour, and dispos'd implicitly to acquiesce in them.

Thus have I endeavour'd to shew from a general View of the State of Mankind, that they are governed chiefly by Authority: it is the Condition of their Being; it is a Condition adapted to their Circumstances, and they cannot act otherwise; it is the Work of Providence. And how vain soever we may be of our own Perfections, and that boasted Dignity of Nature

Nature which sets us above the whole visible Creation, yet we find in fact that Reason has not that universal Sway amongst us, which its Deifiers would assign to it.

The Conclusion I would draw from all this is I hope very obvious, *viz.* that if Authority, if Human Authority be of so great Weight, Divine Authority must be much more so. If Men are so much indebted for their natural Notions of Religion to the Providential Influences of Authority amongst them, how much more effectually must the Force of Divine Authority operate upon their Minds, supposing there were any such thing? And if God in his Providence has so constituted Things, that the Assistance of Others should be made the ordinary and stated Means of their Instruction, why should it be thought a Thing unreasonable that he should still farther assist them by his own *Reveal'd Word*? Is it altogether incredible that Infinite Goodness should condescend to speak to the Work of his own Hands, and to interpose his Authority for their Direction in those important Points, where Direction is so much wanted? Or are Matters of Religion and Morality so well settled and understood amongst us, as to need no farther Improvements? No interesting Truths that lye
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hid from us, no Intricacies nor Uncertainties in Knowledge, that want some more unerring Guide, than the utmost human Sagacity can pretend to, to fix and ascertain them? or, however the more general and conspicuous Principles of Religion should be thought sufficiently plain and intelligible to human Reason, yet how much Darkness and Perplexity would remain still in other Points of the most important Concern? Is it of no Consequence to Mankind, to be assured beyond all doubt of the Certainty of a future State and Judgment, to have *Life and Immortality brought to Light*, to have the Terms of everlasting Happiness and Salvation set before them by God himself? Is it no Relief to a Mind, conscious of Sin and Guilt, to be assur'd of Pardon, of Redemption, and Restoration to the Divine Favour, Advantages which the Gentile World manifestly wanted, and the present degenerate State of Mankind most evidently calls for? But above all, the Motives to virtuous Practice what additional Strength must they receive, were they suppos'd to be inculcated on Men, under the Notion of Duty and Submission to Divine Authority?

II. I proceed therefore to my *Second Head*,
To point out some of the chief Instances,

in which our Blessed Saviour might properly be said to *teach with Authority*.

The first Instance, and that which seems chiefly intended in my Text, is, that Jesus Christ deliver'd his Doctrines and Precepts in a Manner peculiarly adapted not only to instruct his Hearers, but to enforce Obedience to their Teacher: that is, his Method of Teaching was neither after the Example of the Jewish Interpreters, by tedious Prolixities and insipid Comments upon the Law, rather perplexing than enlightening Men's Minds, nor were his Instructions, like those of Moralists, drawn out through a long Train of Reasoning from first Principles in a Way of abstruse Deduction and Consequence, but they were lain down as simple practical Conclusions, as positive Injunctions, and Rules of Duty, in a preceptive and authoritative Manner. Philosophers, for want of that Authority which our Blessed Saviour had, must confine themselves to the strict Methods of Proof and a continued Series of Argument, in order both to gain Attention, and to convince. But whom are they to convince? not surely the Bulk of Mankind, who are incapable of entring into the Reasoning Part, but the Few only of their own little Class, whose

whose Education and Abilities may perhaps enable them to judge, and to distinguish Truth. But the Author of the Gospel-morals, not designing to entertain the World with Theory and System, but adapting his Religion to the general Circumstances and Capacities of Mankind as they are in fact, does therefore with the utmost Propriety address himself to those very Principles of Action, by which they are chiefly influenc'd, I mean the natural Sense of, and implicit Deference to Authority. And accordingly all his Discourses are founded upon this Principle; they have the Stamp of Authority upon them; they are deliver'd in the Form of absolute Commands and Prohibitions; He every where speaks in the first Person, *Verily I say unto you*; He directs Men to himself as the Object and End of their Obedience, *I am the Way, the Truth and the Life*; and He determines even their Acceptance with God upon their Submission to and Dependence upon himself, *No Man cometh unto the Father, but by me*. And hence is it likewise, amongst other Reasons, that so much Stress is laid in the New Testament upon the Duty of Faith, *Ye believe in God, believe also in me*. So again, his Parables and Allegories, which are no more than Illustrations of the Doctrines he would inculcate, and taken

taken from incidental Occasions and Images which immediately occur'd to the Senses, we find them either commonly introduc'd with some authoritative Phrase of, *He that hath ears to hear, let him hear*, or else concluded with some such commanding Application, *Go and do thou likewise*. And in general we may conclude from the whole Tenor of the Gospel, that howsoever all moral Obligations are really founded in Nature, and are deducible from the essential Constitution of Things, yet in the Christian Scheme it must be acknowledg'd they are placed upon a different Foundation; all there is resolv'd into the Will and Authority of our Lord; Obedience, Submission, implicit Resignation, and *doing the Will of our Father which is in heaven*, are made the constituent Parts of our Religion and Morals: and for this reason, that our Blessed Saviour most graciously condescended to adjust his Religion to the Exigencies of Mankind, from whom no effectual Reformation could be expected upon any other Principle, but that of absolute Submission to the Divine Will and Authority.

I am the more particular upon this Point, because I apprehend it is a Consideration that is not so often attended to, as it deserves. The Christian Morality is, I believe, generally

ly allow'd both by its Enemies as well as Friends to be unexceptionably pure and excellent; but whilst some, in order to deprectate it, have maintain'd that there is no moral Precept in the Gospel, but what has been taught by some or other of the Heathen Moralists, which is a Point I need not take upon me to determine because it is nothing to the Purpose, there have been others, who affecting to befriend it, are constantly representing the Gospel-morals as appealing only to human Reason and the natural Judgment of Mankind, and as referring all Obligation to the abstracted Fitness of Action and the essential Differences of Things; and this in order to insinuate that the Gospel can be no other strictly speaking than a Revival, or as it has been call'd a *Republication of the Law of Nature*, that is in other Words, a System of Morals. But tho' it be exceeding true, that all moral Doctrines are of eternal and immutable Obligation in *themselves*, distinct from every other Consideration, yet it is no less true, that this is not the *proper* Foundation they are plac'd upon according to the Christian Dispensation; here they derive their Obligation from quite another Principle, and we are requir'd to conform to them not under the Notion of necessary and essential

tial Truths or Dictates of Reason, but as the immediate Matters of Divine *Command*, and in Obedience to the *Will* of the Sovereign Law-giver.

And indeed so little room have we to imagine that Christianity intends to pay us any Compliment upon the Sufficiency and Strength of our Reason, that it is obvious to see its whole Scheme throughout goes upon the direct opposite Supposition of the Weakness and Depravity of human Nature, of its general Inability to discover a complete Rule of Duty, and of its Want of some new Encouragements, some fresh Obligations to enforce the Practice of it even in those very Parts of it, which Men are suppos'd to be sufficiently acquainted with of themselves. And in this View the Gospel, with respect even to the Moral Part of it, is something more than a *Republication of the Law of Nature*; it is not barely republishing it, it is reinforcing it; it is giving it the Sanction of Divine Authority; it is transferring its Obligation from the cool Dictates of mere human Reason, which is found to be ineffectual for the Purpose, and placing it on the firmer Basis of the Wisdom of God himself. Thus does every moral Duty assume a different Character; they now come to us properly under the

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Form of Religion; they have the Force of positive Institutions; and the *Light of Nature* in the Christian Sense will be no other than the *express Law of God*.

But notwithstanding what has been said, it may be objected that all this is not sufficient to establish such an Authority, as is here suppos'd; that Mankind are not so soon brought to give up their Opinions and Prejudices upon the bare Pretence of an Authority, whose Genuineness is not prov'd; and farther, that they will expect some Advantage to themselves by the Exchange, somewhat at least that shall particularly interest them on the side of their new Teacher for the sake of themselves.

It is therefore another Instance of our Blessed Saviour's *teaching with Authority*, that he inforc'd what he taught with Sanctions of Rewards and Punishments. It has been thought by some an Objection to the Gospel Morality, that its Obligations are suppos'd to be built on Mercenary Principles, and that Virtue and Vice are by this means taken off from their natural Foundations, that of the intrinsic Excellence and Beauty of the one, and the Deformity of the other; tho' these are the sole Motives that should influence rational Minds in the Practice

of their Duty, exclusive of the Consideration of any Reward in view, or Dread of Punishment. If there be any Weight in this Objection, it must arise from hence, that the Rewards and Punishments annex'd to Virtue and Vice are thought to be something external only and foreign to them, that there is no Connexion in Nature between the one and the other, and that therefore they must be look'd upon as no other than arbitrary Sanctions, in order to bribe Men to the Practice of their Duty. But in truth, if Rewards and Punishments are the *necessary* Consequences of human Actions, if they are real natural Sanctions in themselves, and if the eternal Order and Rectitude of Things absolutely require that they should be so, it then certainly can be no longer deem'd an Impropriety that they should be promulg'd and inculcated. What if there should be as close a Connexion in the *Moral* World between human Actions and their future tho' distant Consequences, as there is in the *Natural* World betwixt the most regular Operations of Cause and Effect, and that 'tis as true in the Spiritual as in the literal Sense, that *whatsoever a Man soweth, that shall he also reap*? Will it not follow, that to do justice to the whole Truth, it ought to be consider'd in the whole

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of its Extent? Much less will an infinitely wise Lawgiver omit to guard his Law by that which essentially belongs to it, its own proper Sanction. In this View then, the Reward that is to attend upon Virtue is so far from being to be look'd upon in a servile Light, or as foreign to its Nature, that it is strictly speaking included in the Idea of Virtue itself, and to consider either of them abstractedly from the other is to consider it imperfectly. Such is the gracious Constitution of the Author of Nature, that our Duty and Interest are inseparably connected together; is it therefore lessening the Dignity of Virtue that he invites us to the Practice of the former by the more engaging Motives that are drawn from the Consideration of the latter? And if the Condition of Mankind be such, that they are most effectually to be wrought upon by Applications to their Passions of Hope and Fear, is it unbecoming the Wisdom and Goodness of God to set before them the *proper* Objects of those Passions in the strongest and most affecting Manner? Nay farther, is not this even securing Virtue by means of those very Passions, which without the Consideration of a future State, are made the most frequent Instruments of betraying it? It should seem therefore to need little Apology, that our

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Blessed Lord has establish'd his Religion upon such Principles, as must naturally leave the most lasting Impressions upon Men's Minds.

Consider farther the Necessity of some Divine Authority to ascertain these important Articles. That the Righteous shall be finally rewarded and the Wicked punished, are necessary and eternal Truths, whether they are revealed to us or not; but then such was the State of the Gentile World, that they were distracted with infinite Doubts and Perplexities about them; the Philosophers themselves talk'd of them with great Uncertainty, and rather like Men who wished to be convinc'd of their Truth than that they really were so; whilst the rest of Mankind were left to the wandring Guidance of fabulous Stories and poetical Fictions, where the faint Glimmerings of Truth were scarce discernible amidst the Multiplicity of Errors, in which it was involv'd. Most seasonably therefore did our Blessed Saviour *bring Life and Immortality to light* by his Gospel, that is, he clear'd the Doctrine from the Darknes in which the Corruptions of the World had obscur'd it, he laid it down as a certain Truth, and made it an explicit Article of his Religion: And in this he acted in the proper Character of *one having Authority*, and particularly distinguished himself from

from the Heathen Teachers, whose great Deficiency it was, that they wanted this Sanction to enforce their Doctrines.

But still we are not to imagine that Mankind will thus acquiesce in the bare Claim to an Authority, whose Genuineness is not proved. Neither the particular Manner of Teaching, nor the intrinsic Goodness or Importance of the Doctrines can be conclusive Arguments of the Teacher's being authoriz'd: some more direct Proof will be required to clear him from all Suspicion of Imposture. I shall therefore urge it as the last and the most illustrious Instance of our Blessed Saviour's *teaching with Authority*, that he appealed to his Miracles for the Proof of his Divine Commission. — But Miracles, it is said, do not prove a Doctrine; there is no Connection betwixt Miracles and Truth, they are Instances of *Power* only, may be wrought by evil as well as good Beings, and consequently can be no proper Evidence in the case of Religion, as having no Relation to it. Let it be granted then that Miracles are not the direct Proofs of a Doctrine, which is to be judg'd of by its Conformity to Truth, and the Goodness of its Tendency. But the Question here is not what is the Proof of a Doctrine,

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but what proves the Authority of the Teacher. May not Miracles then be so circumstanc'd, as to afford not only Evidence, but the most infallible moral Evidence of any, that the Author of them is Divinely commission'd? Suppose for instance, they should be remarkable for their Greatness, their Number and Variety, for their long Continuance, for the general Beneficence of their Tendency, for their being such as manifestly surpass'd the known Laws of Nature, for their unquestionable Reality as being exhibited to publick View and attended with all the Marks of undisguis'd Simplicity and Openness, and requiring no other Skill to judge of the Genuineness of the Facts but the plain Testimony of the Senses; and farther, which is more than all, let the Doctrines for whose sake they are suppos'd to be wrought be such as are evidently calculated to promote the Ends of Piety, Righteousness and Truth, and let it be the profess'd Design of the Teacher of these Doctrines to evince his Authority by this Evidence of Miracles, as the proper Seal of his Commission. And now let it be ask'd whether Miracles, upon Supposition of these Circumstances all concurring together, do not amount even to the strictest Demonstration, that the Teacher must be invested
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with an Authority from Heaven, or whether it be possible in the Nature of things that stronger Evidence should be obtain'd.

It will be in vain then to urge, that Miracles are only Instances of superior Power, and that they have been and may be wrought by Evil Beings as well as Good, until it can be shewn to be either consistent with the Design and Character of Evil Beings to work Miracles in the Cause of Truth, or else that it is consistent with the infinite Wisdom and Goodness of God, to set his Seal to an Imposture, by thus commissioning them to delude Mankind, in a way in which the Necessity of being deluded would be unavoidable.

And to as little purpose is it to endeavour to evade the Force of this Argument from Miracles, by pretending there is no Connection between them and the Truth of Doctrines; for if the Divine Authority of the Teacher *as such* be once prov'd by them, the Truth of the Doctrines he teaches will follow of Course; and it will be the same thing in Effect, whether Doctrines have an immediate Connexion with Miracles, or a more remote Dependence on them as Proofs of *his* Commission, upon whose Authority we receive them.

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And accordingly upon this footing it is, that our Saviour himself places his Miracles. He every where appeals to them as the proper Proofs of his Authority, and in consequence of that as Proofs of his Doctrines: *Believe me, that I am in the father, and the father in me, or else believe me for the very Works sake.* (Joh. 14. 11.) *The works which the father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me that the father hath sent me.* (5. 36.) *Though ye believe not me, believe the works.* (10. 38.) And He imputes their Sin to the rejecting this Evidence, *if I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin.* (15. 24.) And the same Testimony we find was expected from him by others, *Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do these Miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.* (3. 2.) We conclude therefore that Miracles were the proper and direct Evidence of our Blessed Saviour's teaching with Authority.

I will beg leave to trespass upon your Patience a moment longer, whilst I draw two Inferences from what has been said in this Discourse.

The first is, The Use of Revelation in general. Mankind, we have seen, are not in that State of Rectitude either as to their intellectual or moral Capacities, as to be a sufficient Guide to themselves in Matters of Religion. Reason, how highly soever we may talk of it in Theory, yet is found in Practice to be unequal to the Task assign'd it. Men do in fact proceed upon other Principles, and their suffering themselves to be so much govern'd by Example, Prejudice and Authority in the common Affairs of Life, shews at least how much they stand in need of some Assistance in the more difficult Concerns of Religion.

And what is there after all which can so effectually tend to the Reformation of Mankind, and which their natural Expectations so loudly call for, as an express written Revelation from the true God, to which they may have Recourse as to a general Rule and infallible Guide of Life? Here they are not left to the wild Suggestions of each Man's Fancy or pretended Reason, to be *toss'd to and fro, and carried about with every wind of Doctrine*, continually fluctuating betwixt Truth and Error, or rather amidst Varieties of Errors; nor are they impos'd the painful Task of collecting their Duty as well as they can from Systems of Mor-

ral Science, and the Intricacies of involv'd Truths. But the Rule is ready at hand, fixt and certain, plain and legible before their Eyes: *For this commandment, which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldst say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it and do it? Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldst say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it and do it? But the word is very nigh unto thee in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayst do it.* (Deut. 30. 11, &c.)

Let me observe farther, that the Supposition of Mankind's subsisting in a State of *unassisted* Reason is in itself unnatural, and unwarranted by Experience. The Religion of Nature, abstracted from all instituted or authoritative Religion, is a visionary Thing; it never yet subsisted in fact; Men have in all Ages and Countries embrac'd their Religion under the Notion at least of its Divine Authority, and have profess'd Obedience to some sort of Revelation, either real or suppos'd. And it is an Observation no less important than it is common, that the ancient Legislators and Founders of Civil Societies found it necessary to *pretend* a Divine Com-

Commission for their Laws and Doctrines, the better to secure Obedience to them from the People. They were not so extravagant to imagine, the Conduct of Mankind would be sufficiently regulated by their Reason, and therefore any authoritative Institution of Religion, tho' often very absurd, was more likely to be effectual for this Purpose, than leaving them to the uncertain Directions of the Light of Nature. Their Philosophers indeed, too honest to pretend to that Authority which they knew they had not, fail'd of Success in proportion, but Politicians scrupled not to counterfeit it, being sensible how much they stood in need of it for the Ends of Government.

The other Inference I would make is, The Expediency of an Establishment of Religion. By an Establishment I mean no more in general, than some Publick Profession and Form of Religion, Authoriz'd and encourag'd by the Civil Magistrate. Religion naturally commends herself to the Protection of the Magistrate; for Religion is the Bond of Society. She asks no other Favour but to be candidly heard, to be admitted to plead her own Cause, to set forth the Relation she bears to Civil Society, the Assistance and Weight she gives to the Administration

stration of Government, and the infinite Obligations she lays on Magistracy, both for the Obedience of the Subject and the Execution of Laws. On the other hand, 'tis obvious to conclude from what has been said in this Discourse, that Religion in general, when left at large, and not subsisting under any *particular* Form or Direction of the Civil Power, would be far from being effectual for the Ends of Government, or answering the Purposes which Society expects from it. There must be some Publick Example, some leading Influence of Authority to encourage and impress the Belief and Practice of it amongst the People; there must be some visible Form and exterior Mode of Worship not only to engage Attention by addressing to the Senses, but even to facilitate the Progress of that real Goodness and internal Virtue of Mind, which it is the Design of all Religious Institutions to promote, and which Society is so much interested in promoting. Every Argument therefore which can be urg'd for the Use of Religion at all, may be urg'd with equal Force for the Expediency of an Establishment, because if Religion be absolutely necessary to make Men good Subjects and useful Members of Society, so in proportion will it be the Interest of Civil Magistrates to promote
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and protect it, by every way that is consistent with the free Nature of Religion itself, and the inviolable Rights of Conscience.

Christianity has not introduc'd any new Schemes in Government, nor given the least Occasion of Jealousy to the Magistrate by an Interfering of Interests. So far from it, that it is most friendly to Government, and gives an additional Sanction to Civil Institutions, for we are taught by it, that *the Powers that be, are ordained of God, and whosoever resisteth the Power, resisteth the Ordinance of God.* In return therefore, it may justly claim the Favour and Encouragement of the State, whose Authority it so much conduces to establish. — May it ever be the Happiness of this Church and Nation, to be a mutual Support and Assistance to each other! And whilst we put Men in mind to be subject to Principalities and Powers, may it never be forgot by them, that the Protection of our Religious Establishment is the strengthening their own Hands, and consequently the best Security of our Constitution!



Lately Publish'd by the same Author, *The Jewish Dispensation Consider'd and Vindicated, &c.* in a Sermon preach'd before the Univerſity of Oxford.